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A decorative brown line drawing of a stylized plant with a large spiral and several leaves, positioned on the left side of the page.

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QUIZ & QUILL IS

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EDITORS' NOTE

It's Spring time, that means warm weather, sunbathing, pollen collapsing every sensory faculty in a seething delirium of allergies...and of course the release of the Quiz & Quill Spring Magazine!

With our Spring Edition we say farewell to all graduating seniors and friends, as well as plant a congratulatory slap on the back to all of the Q&Q's new staff who have triumphed through this 2007-2008 academic year to produce the collection in your hands. As much as we thank our volunteers and staff here, we also extend our deepest gratitude to every writer and artist who submitted their work for publication. We hope that all of you continue to raise your quills and submit yet more of your writing and art next year

[Insert witty quote here]

Alec Volpe & Allison Bradley



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A decorative illustration of a flower with three leaves and a stem, positioned to the left of the title.

IN THE HOTEL ROOM

Greg Dennie

In the hotel room, my dress blue uniform was strewn about. The blouse lay inside out and crumpled against the wall and my trousers were inverted, completely hanging off the bed. My boxers were still attached to the crotch of the pants as if they were sewn on—it looked as if a Marine exploded. There were pieces of a plastic hanger in various places of the room, and close by there was an empty and distressed bottle of Coke next to an empty bottle of rum. The rum bottle stood upright—a trophy of my night's achievements. My rifle badge was broken and dangling from the blouse under my ribbons, which were crooked and bunched together. I don't know what most of the ribbons mean or how I earned them; I am only aware that I am supposed to have seven, but I only wore six that night—and I am rather certain they were the correct six. I was naked and standing in front of the window on the sixth floor. I was naked, except for my socks because they were out of regulation and I was proud of myself for wearing striped socks in my uniform. I also kept my watch on because I never take it off; because I like to know where I stand in life—I have learned to take comfort in knowing that life keeps moving and that I can track it with a wrist watch. But, for the most part, I was naked.

Without the uniform, and without clothes, and without my ribbons or the knowledge of what those ribbons mean, I am still only a Marine; a naked Marine on the sixth floor of a fancy hotel. I can explode. I can break down. I can run away and hide. But the Marines will still claim ownership of me whether they want to or not—whether I want it or not. Naked or crazy.

My date was lying on the bed in a somewhat similar state, but she still had the sense to find me amusing. A giggle, to let me know I was not alone. A giggle reminds me that I had been good; that I had been happy—that I had also been outrageous; that I had hugged a retired First Sergeant, the Commanding Officer, and a Master Sergeant—three people who could reprimand me for so much as not greeting them properly—at the bar. It reminds me also, that I am naked.

A cough.

“Hey, Dad?”



"Hello?"

"Dad, how's it going?"

"Oh, hey, how are you?"

"Good. It sounds like you have a bad cold."

"Yeah, I've got what your mom had last week. I'm pretty sick, but I feel fine right now."

"Oh, okay. Well, hey, I'm headin' out to Dayton for the ball tonight, and I was wondering if I could borrow one of your flasks. I kinda wanna bring two flasks because the bar is only free for beer and wine."

"Um, okay. You're not gonna fill it up, are you?"

"Uh...what? I don't really know what else I'm gonna do with it."

"Oh, yeah. Sure."

"Seriously, Dad? I'm gonna drink tonight."

"Yeah. Yeah, I know. I was...just kidding with you. Come on by."

He wasn't kidding, only he felt foolish. He doesn't want me to be an alcoholic. He says he was an alcoholic once. He must see a copy of himself when he sees me, the way I catch a glimpse of the future every time I ask him about his past. I track my progress in life, using his life's path as my map. He cannot tell me what to do these days, though, because he knows I am headstrong the way he once was.

At my parents' house, because of the lack of pain pills before his surgery, all of my dad's flasks are filled with Old Grand Dad whiskey already and I don't think my date will like whiskey. Instead, I use his funnel and fill up my own flask with my rum. I tell my dad that I'm not normal and he says, well, what is normal, and I reply that, even with all my problems, he shouldn't worry about me drinking because it's what I do. He falls uneasily silent. He knows exactly what I mean. Maybe he's been on my side of the conversation before...all the same, he knows enough to let me go wherever it is I am taking myself. So then we talk a little football; football is the basis of our normalcy and the most reliable facet of our conversations. But we stop short after discussing the scheduled games of the day because he is visibly worried about me. I think he sees me catapulting forward into a downward spiral every time I drain a bottle, and this notion is not unfounded. For this, I leave with only one flask—a kind of show of respect, but also of disregard. Upon leaving, I am nervous and shaking for reasons I cannot explain to myself (or refuse to explain to myself, or refuse to explain to an audience) and I am ready to give Dad a hug, but he says he doesn't want to get me sick and he says, "I love you, son" and I leave.

There's an urge to cry, but I don't know where it'll get me, or even where it came from...and in only a few hours I'll be hammered at a bar in my sharpest uniform with a beautiful date.

In high school, a couple days after a fist fight between Dad and me, we were driving somewhere. Somewhere unimportant, I imagine. His consolation to me was to tell me that he knew it to be an awful feeling when a boy finds out he can beat up his father. I knew he was right, even though I had spent years waiting for the moment when I could strong arm him—I had even vocalized this desire in previous fits of rage. I would no longer hold his hand in crowds or hide behind him whenever I got scared. But I wasn't scared at the time. It wasn't fear that plagued me anymore. Was it consoling or devastating to know he had been through this also? I would have to learn to co-exist with Dad as an equal—as far as physical dominance was concerned. Arguments became different, knowing that I could damage him...and this was not our last fist fight. I don't think I ever caught a football pass from him again.

When Dad was 17 he joined the Coast Guard. I know very little about his time in the Coast Guard, only that he could type as fast as most normal people could speak; he knew—and still knows—Morse Code; and he didn't like the system much—not enough to stay in, anyways. There was a slight amount of astonishment when I was young and found his sea-bag, because it was militaristic and my brothers and I were still obsessing over G.I. Joes at the time. Not much was said about it—even then, to children who already idolized their father. I suppose maybe we weren't supposed to find the bag, or his old uniform, or the picture of him when he could still slip into the uniform. When I think back to his reaction to our questions about his service, I can only picture him being brief and humble—and I am always fearful that I can sense shame in these memories. The shame that he was not a war hero, and the shame that I may not have what it takes to be a war hero. The shame that I may not have what it takes to be a good Marine—an unbreakable Marine.

“I had always figured I was going to join the Army when I was growing up. But when I was 17, there was a lot of controversy...and I joined the Coast Guard. I had a chance to go to Vietnam, but I didn't volunteer. I knew it wouldn't involve combat; it would have been on a river far from the combat—I just didn't want to go.”

This is the most I have ever found out about his service. He objected to the war in Vietnam. He told me the names of a couple people who influenced his



decision to object, but I can't remember the names, and I don't feel like asking for the names. I don't feeling like knowing more than what he will tell me.

Dad's secrets, I always imagine, are the same secrets I keep. I don't dig for bones in his closet, because I might reveal the skeletons in mine.

In a fit of rebellion, as I so often found myself when I was 17, I left home. I caught the bus to a friend's apartment. I wandered into the apartment hallucinating on too many pills. I left the apartment, hung over, three days later, leaving my virginity behind. When I came back home, my parents' wedding photograph on the window sill in the dining room looked different. Mom had been pregnant in the photo. Dad didn't wait, either.

The next summer, I told Mom and Dad I was joining the military. Though they were proud of me for focusing on something in life, Dad questioned my decision; especially, when a few months later, I had decided on the Marines.

Dad had known Marines in his younger years and never liked them. There was satisfaction knowing that I was going to be one of the hard-asses Dad never liked. Was I going to be the same guy who bullied Dad at the bar in the 70s? I never asked if he got into it with any Marines, or if they ever got into it with him, but there was apprehension on his part when I left for boot camp.

Behind broken and dry bottles, Dad has seen me break. After a night of trying to drink myself to death, I broke down—I lost the ability to function on any normal level and I cried in his arms. He held a broken Marine; a Marine who knew that whatever it was that he had wanted to become, he was not it. In his arms, I was not the stoic Marine who fought soldiers, sailors, airmen, and college kids in bars. I was not the marine from the movies, or even the one in the papers. And I was not the polite intellect, who never fought, either. And I reached out to him. He reached back and told me about his life. I couldn't look at his tired face because I was afraid or embarrassed, or helpless, or ashamed. But I could hear him, and in his voice was the sound of time: low and factual—interminably consistent. His voice was like a clock, and with each vibration I could sense a tick-tock. The age in his voice, and the lines on his face that I couldn't look at, told me that life kept its own rhythm—it kept going.

In Dad's arms, and in the desperate misery I lay in, I felt the greatest comfort I have ever felt: knowing that he—Marine or not—had been through it also.

And as I later stared out the hotel window, naked on the sixth floor, I

thought about why Dad wasn't excited to have me join the Marines. I thought about why I wasn't always thrilled with my own decision. He knew I would one day rebel against the system, the way I imagine he did in the Coast Guard, and the way I did in high school. I think he knew I'd try to shed the uniform one day. And maybe he knew it would be a useless attempt that would only leave me naked behind a window. He must've known that not every Marine was a good Marine, that some Marines broke...exploded...ran away...hid...and still had to go on living with the title, the system, and the expectations forced on them from outside; from inside, too. And as my date giggled, I turned around. I giggled, too. I laughed because I was drunk and I was ridiculous—I was happy. I laughed because the night was not the end; because breaking down was not the end, either—it wasn't even the worst part.

In the morning I would be sober; I would be clothed. I would gather the pieces of my uniform, brush them off and gently place them in a garment bag...and repair them.





I DO REMEMBER YOUR BIRTHDAY

Joanna Brown

See me sleeping in the bathtub
For clarity's sake,
For the sheen of green tiles too early removed and hopes of a morning, dry hair.

It was my think tank.

A walled hydroplex of leftover moistures.

Your last sliver of soap is lodged somewhere in my throat
And it's unfair
Because I forget exactly how it is that your teeth overlap.

Sometimes I can still feel the size of your wrists.
I feel them
Bleeding—on the inside

When I held them tight,
My fingers wrapped,
Pressed over the inside
To stop adventurous you
From embarrassing yourself.
Yes, blood pumps strongly.

We grazed on that couch whose textures I've already forgotten,
Whose colors meld with my surprise at finding someone else who bathes in the dark.

It makes you feel like a god,
A shower of black warmth.

And who knows for sure
If you said you do because you do

Or did

Or just as persuasion, to ease me back into multi-body showers
for the first time since pigtails and synchronized swimming.

I can only hope that my hesitations are not always so apparent
Or bless me Father the next time I'm near a horse.

And in the dark,
In your house's bathroom,
I don't know which bottles are which
And can't possibly read labels,
So I end the night smelling like a man,
Smelling like you so much more intimately than ever before or ever after.

I had bathed in you.

Beat that.

But now my one sacred place,
My go-to cradling-white
is tainted
so hard
because when I'm here
I feel you standing naked and shooting
smiles at me across the one foot
of space forgiven in such a small
curtained pod,

one foot
closing fast
I swallow
your smiles
and we steam.

I felt clean with you.

And see me now
Circling your stories around my brain,
Lying in the bottom of any ruined tub.



FULTON STREET CAMELOT

Claire Parson

I see her
As though time has never passed
Standing
In her black heels
On the orange carpet of our living room
Beautiful and poised
The round Jackie (then Kennedy) hat
Perched upon her not-yet-gray-streaked hair
Netting brushing her forehead
Partially concealing one green eye
Tucked inside her pocketbook
That neatly matched her shoes
Is her cherries-in-the-snow lipstick
If needed, she will apply again later
To her quick-to-smile lips

We
her daughters
gangly, awkward fly-away blondes
alternately perched or sprawled
upon the couch
witness with pride
a rare night out
astonished as mom looked like a woman
and dad looked like a man

Smitten
Dad in his starched shirt
And well pleated trousers
Hat tipped rakishly
Places her wrap

Around her still slim shoulders
The fox resting
Dark and silky
Seductive and unblinking
In his den of female skin
Oddly biting his own tail



ORANGES & COFFEE

Claire Augustine

Oranges and coffee
Chocolaty sweet
Wet pull apart
Liquid darling sticky sweet
Anticipation
Open
Relief


Color my breath
With dark dirt of fire, low simmer
Stick my fingers together
Nails going under the skin
That cries separation

Your wounds spill on me
I lick myself clean
Thumb in the center
I split you
Apart

THAT UNEXPLAINABLE FEELING

Ali Horton





INTER-GENRE RELATIONSHIPS

Kate Mock

SOPHIA – a romantic heroine, dramatic and emotional
JUDITH – an inspirational self-helper, maternal and logical
TRYSTYRHIANNALANA – fantasy, mysterious and ethereal
SALLY – juvenile fiction, childlike and endlessly energetic

SCENE: A CAFÉ IN THE WORLD OF LITERATURE

SOPHIA sits at a café table with three empty chairs. She represents the Romantic Novel, and is humming to herself while daydreaming. JUDITH, the Self-Help genre, enters looking for Sophia.

SOPHIA

[waving] Judith! Judith, over here!

JUDITH

Hello. How are you feeling?

SOPHIA

I am beyond words.

JUDITH

You and I both know that is impossible.

SOPHIA

True enough. But my emotions, they overwhelm me.

JUDITH

Not again.

SOPHIA

Yes! Again! My face is burning, my heart is racing, my thoughts cannot leave him—I'm in love!

JUDITH

[simultaneously with Sophia] You're in love. You're always in love.

SOPHIA

This time is different. I can feel it.

JUDITH

It only seems different; it always ends the same.

TRYSTYRHIANNALANA, Fantasy, enters looking for her friends. She moves as though floating over the ground, carried by unseen forces.

SOPHIA

Lana is approaching; I long to share my good fortune with her.

TRYSTYRHIANNALANA

[mysterious, but concerned] Friends, when I arrived I sensed a new energy to this place. Something is happening. Something is growing. Something powerful.

JUDITH

Lana, please be sure not to confuse your digestive patterns with the supernatural. We do not need another episode of widespread panic.

TRYSTYRHIANNALANA

No, I can feel it this time. Something has changed since last we met.

SOPHIA

Oh, so much! At last, I have found true love.

TRYSTYRHIANNALANA

Manuelo?

SOPHIA

Good heavens, no. I finally realized that we do not speak the same language.

TRYSTYRHIANNALANA

He did not come with a translation?

SOPHIA

He did, but I felt that I was learning only half of his story.

JUDITH

Which is why you should learn from your past, Sophia. Only then will you keep from making the same mistakes again. You should be keeping to your own kind.

SOPHIA

But I have this time. He's so romantic.

SALLY enters. She represents Children's Literature, bright and colorful but somewhat lacking in plot or complex sentences. She is in her own world and does not yet see the threesome at the table. Trystyrhiannalana notices her.

TRYSTYRHIANNALANA

Is that Sally, there, in the distance?

SOPHIA

I thought we had agreed to avoid her company.

JUDITH

Now, now. She has much to offer; we should appreciate her.

SOPHIA

But she is so...juvenile.

JUDITH

Try to think of her as youthful, energetic, and full of life.

TRYSTYRHIANNALANA

And simplistic. And vocabulary deficient.

JUDITH

Ssh. She's coming. Be nice.

SALLY

Friends! See Sophia. Hugs! See Judith. Hugs! See Trystyrnanu... [can't quite pronounce it, tries again] See Trystyrnoonah...[fails again] See Trystyr—

TRYSTYRHIANNALANA

[snapping in annoyance] Trystyrhiannalana! [collects herself] My friends call me Lana.

SALLY

See Lana. Hugs! Pretty blue sky, warm yellow sun. Good day. Good friends.

SOPHIA

Yes, precisely. As I was saying, you really must meet him. He is tall, dark, handsome, and he speaks so eloquently. Every word from his lips is poetry, pure poetry! I love him!

SALLY

Love! Do you love me? I love you!

TRYSTYRHIANNALANA

[annoyed by Sally] Wonderful. He sounds as though he really might be the other half of your soul, finally reaching you after endless journeys between the Living and the Realm of the Unliving. You met him in Romance?

SOPHIA

Well, no. Not quite.

JUDITH

But you said he was Romantic.

SOPHIA

Oh, he is.

JUDITH

[getting to the point] What is his genre, Sophia? Your friends deserve honesty.

SOPHIA

[hesitantly] His name is Lorenzo.

TRYSTYRHIANNALANA

That does not quite sound Foreign.

JUDITH

Which is good, seeing as communication is one of the most vital aspects of a relationship. But you cannot avoid the question forever. Hiding never solves your problems.

SALLY

Come out, come out, wherever you are!

JUDITH

Sally, be quiet. Sophia, come clean. Where is he from?

SOPHIA

[finally bursting] He's Shakespearean!

JUDITH

Oh, Sophia.

TRYSTYRHIANNALANA

It could be worse. He could be Russian. They're always mourning lost loves or perishing tragically. Shakespeareans can be quite comic.

SOPHIA

[not so convincingly] You see? He can be comic.

JUDITH

But he isn't, is he? [Sophia shakes her head]

SALLY

Do not lie. It makes us cry.

JUDITH

Sally, hush.

SOPHIA

[cannot keep it in any longer] He's a Tragic Hero.

SALLY

Oh no!

JUDITH

Sophia! It will never work!

SOPHIA

Why not?

JUDITH

You're a Romance. You need passionate nights followed by tender mornings.

SOPHIA

But he is passionate and tender.

JUDITH

With personal demons he will spend most of his time battling.

SOPHIA

I will help him through his troubles. Together we can overcome anything.

JUDITH

Ophelia was a Romantic Heroine just like you before she got tangled up with Hamlet. Your kind can't handle a man that complex; you don't have the character depth.

TRYSTYRHIANNALANA

This is what I sensed. This is the powerful force—you're tempting the wrath of the Denouement, Sophia, and you know it. Ever since the defeat of the Deus Ex Machina by the more popular Realism, happy endings are increasingly harder to find.

SOPHIA

What if I don't want a happy ending?

SALLY

And they lived happily ever after!

JUDITH

Sally, you are not helping.

SOPHIA

Well, neither are you, Miss Self-Help!

JUDITH

Now is not the time to turn on your friends. We're here for you.

SALLY

Here, there, everywhere!

JUDITH

Sally, go ask the waiter for a cookie.

SALLY

Cookies? Yum! [runs off stage]

SORFRIED, a tall, dark and handsome man approaches the table. He is writing in a notebook as he walks, and he is so deep in thought that he almost runs into the table.

JUDITH

Can I help you, sir?

SORFRIED

Pardon?

JUDITH

Can I help you?

SORFRIED

I doubt it. No one can truly help anyone; we have all been thrust into this world blindly and unwillingly and no one knows what our true purpose is. So, no, I do not think you can help me.

JUDITH

But I help everyone. It's what I do. It's what I am.

SORFRIED

Can any man be helped until he knows what he needs? And how can he know what he needs until he knows why he is here? And how can he know why he is here until he departs and can look back with the wisdom of hindsight? No, madam, I think you have confused your purpose. There is no help.

[Sorfried exits, leaving Judith in stunned silence.]

TRYSTYRHIANNALANA

Don't let what he said get to you. He is only fulfilling his own niche. It is his destiny.

JUDITH

But—but he said such terrible things. He was so rude!

SOPHIA

And gorgeous! And deep, thoughtful, profound! Oh, Judith, I'm in love!

JUDITH

[throwing her hands up in despair] But he's an Existentialist!

BLACKOUT



RESTLESS

Manuel Alejandro Melendez

Azure as one can be,
I live in this distance of dreaming and the awake,
That I no longer hold my body captive in cobalt chains,
But open wide the gates of my indigo hands,
And release, release the cerulean Word!

Where do our bodies wander, where the minds go?
I am the prisoner of frosted thinking,
In the gravity of ivory light,
Where nonsense (*no sense*) senses speak in shades of bloodless prose,
But I remain—the chalk of clarity in a room of dust and void.

Must I feel, to always be a lone?
Wearing my Dahlia mask in the room required of me,
I feel faltering the fullness of my flame,
Geranium organs within so steadily keeping the beat,
As I, escaping the carmine bloom—deepening, deepening the growing
weeds of wound!

Yes,
Restless is the figure that slumbers in hue haze, and dreams to live
the bottomless sad of his days...

Fixed,
The dancer upstairs,
In motion moving memory,
Until all is none and the music rests,
Something blue, a piece of white heat, and the rest in red—
Colors are the life,
And living the canvas itself

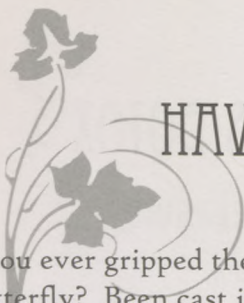


MOTHER TERESA'S BOTOX

Claire Parson

Sleep-deprived we are sold magic
from merchants preaching
from flickering pulpits.
They are Evangelists
promising everlasting life:
 eye cream penance,
 mineral dust miracles
 and breast resurrection.

What would we see
on Mother Teresa's face
If every line and crease
were pulled, plumped,
smoothed and stretched?
Would she have selflessly committed?
Would she have heard her name when the voice was calling?
Which of my own lines am I to give up
those placed there by my daughter's laughter
or those marking my son's journey to become a man?
Why as I look in the mirror and see my mother's face
am I not thankful she has come to visit,
when I have dreamed of seeing her again?



HAVE YOU EVER?

Valerie Starkey

Have you ever gripped the motion
of a butterfly? Been cast into
an unpredictably long staring stint
by the beauty of its paper-sheer
wings aflutter? Ever noticed
at its departure the flyaway
magnetism it has on your desire?

Or have you seen the common
woman, makeupless, intent and
in motion—what power she has!
She doesn't notice flyaway hairs
that cast semi-sheer darkness on
her face; she thinks only of the
to-do list gripped in her palm.
This cannot be forgotten.

And have you seen the cast
bow at curtain call? Felt the
motion of the standing ovation—
gripped by the sheer magnificence
of performance and imagination?
Have you been left with a flyaway
heart by a play that feels too real?



OVERRIPE FRUIT

Nick DeFazio

Have you seen this lonely fruit whose skin is sweeter than its guts but even so

When fruit falls heavy on small ranches can you imagine what will happen when the bananas get warmer and the yellow skin turns black like dark tumors there's a rumor that there's a rumor that

Fruit will ripen with stipends earned from pawning excess sunlight or twilights saved by Lite-Brite allies but only until the

Warm dark nights when fruit sits in glass bowls and ages like sages separated from the womb for days becoming deeper and deeper in themselves eating themselves like an anorexic becoming obsessed and infected with their dye it is the dye that keeps them alive and makes them die and keeps them from tasting like every other fruit

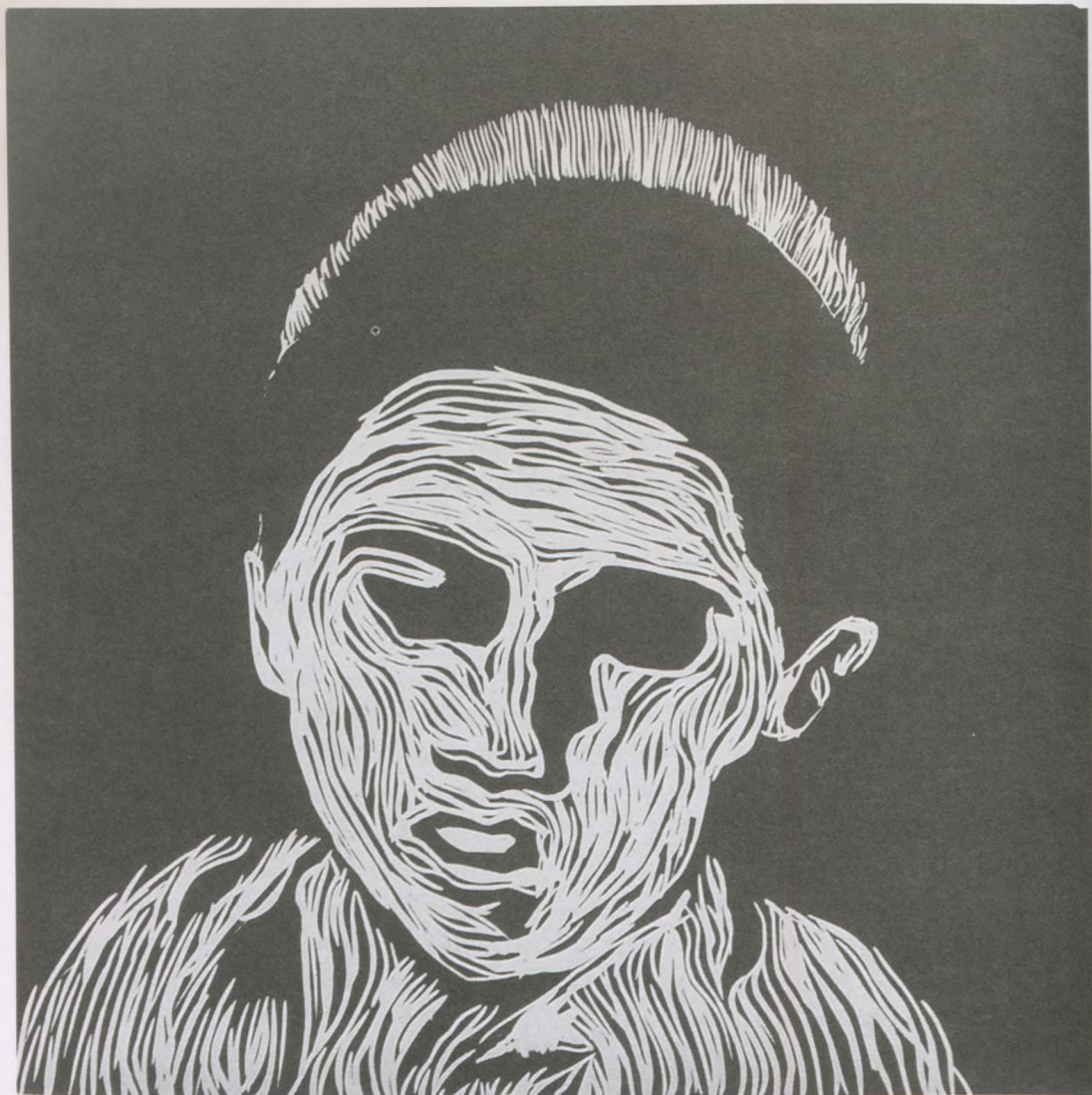
And apples contain vitamins from worms' original sins that help kids have strong and healthy spines connecting their minds to their bodies like it's lassoing in their movements like it's just passing the time

Yet we all know that flies encircle flowers even after they die because they still smell like flowers even when they have nothing left to cry but fruit is only fruit for so long whether in a salad or in a pie it's not the blood that keeps us alive or makes us die it's the sweetness in our lonely cries that we can't disguise that finally does us in

Like an old man in a glass bowl in a hospital room falling down a deep dark hole leading to the branch that gave him life like a blind man's wife as the insides lose their sweetness but the skin resists with its fading grimace that retains both the sweetness and the pain and will warn the others of what there is to lose and the little that there's to gain.

BOY FROM THE COUNTRYSIDE

Sandi Thouvenin





FRESH PEARS

Angel Alexander


Meandering through
a dense flower shop
I stopped at the pears
of brick-red paper mache
and seaweed-green leaves
dipped in phlegm-like paste—
overlapping layers forming pears
appalling as canned pears
doused in syrup
heavy on your tongue and lips

pears once welcomed me—
welcomed me to California
told me not to worry
it wouldn't be so bad
greeted me each day in the lunch line
I took two
one to eat immediately
the other to eat at home

like Ricardo next to me in class
pears fresh and unfamiliar with cans
were new to me
North Carolina had not had
fresh pears or Mexicans
and I'd never taken off my shoes
to enter a house in North Carolina

Pears of paper mache
red as blood dried long ago
lie haphazardly on a glass table
here in Ohio
thirteen years from California
thirteen years from fresh pears



A decorative floral illustration featuring a stylized flower with three petals and a long, thin stem that curves downwards, passing through the text.

ON READING TED HUGHES ON CZESLAW MILOSZ

Morgan Ritchie

I wonder
Laying down in the bloodied cobbles of Milosz's mind,
If what I write carries the ink black weight of
Unheard lives?

If trapped
Before the gunman's blaze of final resting power
Do I fall into the din of memorized mind
Laughing loud?

When charged
With empty pen or rifle how does one adhere
To scraping paper lines over less
Pleasant ends?

A decorative floral illustration in the top left corner, featuring a stylized flower with three petals and a long, winding stem that curves downwards.

TOMAS & THE BREAD

Manuel Alejandro Melendez

Tomás: Bread has always been inside me. Or, perhaps, I have always been inside it.

I remember—not a mirage, but as if in lucid dream, my first early morning, as the tagalong brother in tow, to the baker's, eager and expectant of what I might receive. Louis had been the breadwinner then, my father too long gone into his blue rooms, my mother too eager to remain in her white, and so he took it upon his straw-covered shoulders to walk the mile and provide for us, if only momentarily.

Intense was the heat, scorching my bare feet, his sandals aloof, barren, and we were all in a wasteland then. *What did I know? How could I have?* It's uncomplicated to realize that as a young boy, barely reaching my brother's belly in height, I knew nothing myself, and stole merely what others said, took it for their worth, and repeated it inside myself, over like one of my father's records, until they too stuck, and I was left with the message. But—ahead of the message, as always, I remain assured that this is a happy toast to memory.

The line was long even before the sun was raised full, a myriad of bodies and stances, variations of the same helpless, the identical instant of realizing the loss they all shared. I was an impatient one, and tapped incessantly on the naked earth, loving carelessly the muddy prints left on my soles, knowing the pains my mother will go to be rid of them, just so I may do it all once more. And then it finally came to me. The aroma was intoxicating, a scent I no longer recognized as safe, for all I wanted was to bathe in it, dance around its hues, destroy everything around me, if only to come closer to the origin, the cusp of the ecstasy it brought to me.

Louis turned to me then and bowed his figure gently next to mine, before reaching into his pocket and handing me the shiny peso, the gold star. He wanted me to pay, wanted me to be the one to ask for a piece of Heaven, here, on the very floor of it, where all souls go to bite more than they can ever hope to chew. I began to sweat delightedly, the brimming rays of the sun hitting me repeatedly through my worn tee, my floppy, lop-sided curls ever eager to fall on my eyes and keep me from seeing anything else—even my body, even then, wanted only bread.

By the time it was my turn, Louis had been whispering a song to himself, the way he kept himself awake, alive in a moment. I turned on my heels and rose, as high as I could, holding the shiny star in my hand, dropping it as manna into the hands of the stranger behind the counter, his eyes shining, perhaps from the gold he saw, perhaps from my own reflection, and went into a backroom.

He came back with a loaf of bread, of course.

The biggest I'd seen.

The biggest I'll ever see.

The first one will always be the biggest.

When we arrived home, my mother smiling warmly, my father in the back, fiddling with the coffee, its black scent already captivating me, welcoming me—there was no before, no after—I only wanted to be in that moment forever. The imperfections on the bread as I sat and watched it, made me fall in love with everything around me, and as I dug into its roots and crusts, the crumbs falling ceaselessly on my naked lap, all I saw was my brother's teeth biting, my mother's eyes glowing, my father's hands moving wildly, pouring the milk, and somehow, myself, watching it all, from the great distance beyond, the happenstance of remembering.

It never happened this way.

It was always like this.

Memory is like bread too, in every way.

Finally, my father's words crystallize years after...

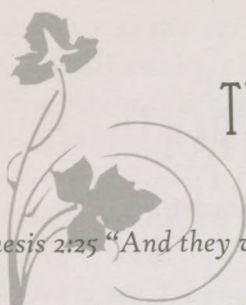
Dios, he always told me as he held the bread, *Dios vive* aqui.



WHERE I AM FROM

Raichal Gladman

I come from the back streets
Falling out of the womb somewhere between
North Douglas and Reaper Ave.
Born with brass knuckles in one hand,
A roll of found quarters in the other,
And "Love thy neighbor" tattooed from hip to hip
My umbilical cord is tethered from the railroad tracks
Of the inner city
Where tired and broken men hang themselves
From rusted trestles
With sprawling profane graffiti
Over shallow polluted creeks
I come from abandoned warehouses
Quiet factories
Broken glass
And broken dreams
Where the feral cats frolic
In the knee-high weeds
Where life is just surviving
And making ends meet



THE SKINNY

Brianna McPherson

Genesis 2:25 "And they were both naked...and were not ashamed."

The air around us was still as we hurried down to the beach. Young. Wild. Free. *I'm young. Wild. Free.* A mantra to keep me from turning tail and running back into the hotel. On the outside, I was all smiles, laughing, my legs propelling me toward the frothy, thrashing, ink-black Atlantic Ocean. But underneath my baby pink swimsuit my skin was crawling. In a moment, I'd be pulling off that suit, revealing what the Bible told us all to hide. I imagined my friends recoiling at the sight of mounds of white, flabby, over-stretched skin. I stomped on one of the many fat, slow cockroaches that congregated nightly in the garden of the hotel to crush my fear. The beach was only 200 yards from the hotel...

My friends and I went on a road trip to Hilton Head Island, South Carolina, for our dear friend Chris' 21st birthday. Chris constantly dreams of travel and things much larger than himself, so we all piled in cars and rolled south, in that typical college kid fashion. All summer long he and the rest of the guys talked about the likelihood of getting various friends and acquaintances to go skinny dipping. They would discuss it nearly every day, in front of everyone. Would they or wouldn't they?

"Nah," they would say, "I think she talks a big game, but when it got down to it, she would never jump in."

Or, "Oh yeah, I bet he'd do it. He runs around campus with his shirt off!"

They never had to speculate if I would "go skinny" or not. I told them without hesitation, "Yes! Of course!" In the seventh grade, I had put it on a list of things I wanted to do before I died; it was one of the few things on the list that I still wanted to do.

The worst of it started in middle school, the body hating. My group of friends hopped on that teen angst bandwagon of self-loathing. And then, my friends began to skip lunch. Instead of packing lunches with hostess cupcakes and bologna sandwiches, they would come to the table with a single small apple or large bottle of water or nothing but the gum they

bummed off a kid in fifth period.

"Oh, I'm on a diet," one would say as she nursed the bottle of Aquafina.

I began to bring crackers and cheese instead of my traditional ham and ketchup. I suppose I didn't have the same steely determination that my other friends had. One would always offer me advice she got off websites that instructed girls on how to become anorexic without the people around them becoming suspicious. She took her meals in her room and when her mother was asleep in front of the television, she'd throw away her dinner and wash the dish. No evidence.

I never had the guts to actually do it. I knew I'd get caught. And I would be so hungry...

But still, I watched my body swell year after year, despite all attempts to deter it. Tae Bo, dance classes, youth league soccer, a diet consisting of only 1,000 calories a day. I was a jiggly juggernaut of fat that has only recently been stalled due to the fast-paced lifestyle I lead as a student. I barely have enough time to breathe, let alone consume enough calories a day to gain a significant amount of weight.

All week we talked about it. Skinny dipping. The boys made sure of it, with their obsession with nudity. The only reason I can conjure for this fixation is that being Christian boys, they are not "supposed" to watch porn or even gaze at bodies lustfully. The human form was, in a way, the final frontier for many of my friends. They were pushing their boundaries as far as they could. They were tiptoeing the line of sin, and it was thrilling. We all, of course, knew Chris' feelings on the subject as soon as he ran through the courtyard of my apartment complex with his pants pulled down over his butt and preformed Chinese fire drills at red lights with his boney, white bum exposed to us all.

I threatened all summer when I got angry at the boys that I would just pull down my pants and moon them or yank up my top and flash them.

"And it won't be a pretty sight! Staring directly at my body is like staring into the eyes of a Basilisk. You'll turn into stone!"

They weren't listening, already turned back to their shooter video game.

I was thirteen when I got my first Boyfriend. How happy I was! I wrote in my journal how I felt womanly for the first time in my life, how I felt like I could dance and sing and put rib-

bons in my hair. How lovely it was to be considered worthy! That I could be picked from hundreds of girls! Of course, hindsight is 20/20 and I now see how silly I was then, how silly it all was. That we said I love you after a month. That all we did was kiss, kiss, kiss. That we said we'd never feel so alive ever again. I was devastated when he dumped me via instant messenger after only three months.

Years later, in high school, one of the lunch table friends dated my first Boyfriend. Boyfriend confided in Lunch Table Friend why he dumped me. Boyfriend never thought I was all that particularly lovely. Boyfriend found my words and intelligence above par, but that unsightly body...no, Boyfriend could not have a girlfriend with such large amounts of shame.

Boyfriend doesn't know that Lunch Table Friend told me these things. Boyfriend doesn't know how I used to dream of magic scissors that I could use to cut off all the fat under my arms and chin and belly button. The magic scissors would just snip, cut, take away the flesh forever, so that I would never have to see it again. No blood. No gore. Just permanent relief with just a few hundred snips here, another thousand there.

Chris, as well as the other boys, has little to lose with their nudity. At least, they do not have the same loss that I must experience. They are as thin as rails and each handsome in a distinctive, fetching way. There is nothing particularly baffling about their functions. It is outside, clearly on display.

And more importantly, the expectation for boys to be boys is built into our society. Boys will be boys and will carry on like little men. It is normal to touch, to dream of the softness of breasts.

Women, on the other hand, have hips and breasts and bottoms and hidden mysteries that only the brave discover. It is not simple, what is hidden inside of me, inside of every young girl. The fleshiness of our bodies carries a heavy, living price. Expose, and there's no secret. Give it up and there's no bargaining chip. Girls will be girls and will act like young women. It is not appropriate to let go, let out, become. We must not touch or dream of where the trail of dark hair leads.

It would be naïve of me to assume that boys do not fight their own personal battles regarding their bodies. It's a fight worth fighting. But I am a young woman with shame and a mind for my own body, and only enough courage to uncover what I have been given, let alone what has been granted to men. I do not have the boldness to ask. It is said that good girls are seen and not heard....

Since high school, I've been referred to as a feminist, or worst, a Femme-Nazi. Mostly because I would not allow males to open doors for me, refused to answer to diminutive terms like "shorty," "chick," or "boo," and was the first of my politically apathetic classmates to discover reports that stated Wal-Mart or some other corporate swine company was paying their women less than men.

But each night I'd lie in bed and think about him. The "him" was different nearly every month or so. Most often, the him was fictional. And he would know exactly what to do to heal the wounds in me. He would have magical fat scissors or eyes that did not see excess. And I expected him soon. As soon as he would come I knew I would feel lovely.

Genesis 3:16 "Unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow..."

The first night of our trip down south, we stayed at a cheap Motel 8. As a group of girls are wont to do when the impending doom of having to appear half-dressed in a public area draws nigh, we showed one another our bathing suits and commiserated. All my suits were tankinis, perfect for covering up my overflowing girth. My bottoms were always skirted to hide my wide and imposing hips and butt. All my beautiful friends shared their own woes about appearing on the beach during the day wearing things that would make our ancestors blush. They would pinch at negligible flaps of skin under their arms and bellies when they could easily boast of glowing skin, naturally bright blonde locks, firm, sculpted buttocks, or perfect hourglass figures. I went to bed jealous. I prayed for a storm the next night.

Since I started college I have gone in and out with my body, like a tide following the moon. When I walk past tall windows, I crane my head to the side to see the curve of my spine pull down into my bottom, my hips widening with a smooth curve. I watch in the mirror the way my full cheeks bend upwards to make their own smile. There is goodness in the flesh, I know this. There is life and blood and even a worthy beauty.

But the shame always creeps in, inescapable. I climb out of the shower in the morning, and in the mirror I see the piles of pink, dampened fat.

So this is what they saw...

There was no storm the next night. In fact, the weather was perfect for skinny dipping: overcast and still, with no moon to expose us and no great storm to cause the waves to thrash roughly. Every now and then, there was a gust of wind that blew up the little skirt on my bathing suit, but it died down as soon as it came, like the air had hiccupped. Due to my poor night vision and the extreme lack of light on the beach, I could barely tell where the sand ended and the water began. It was a large expanse of blackness, disturbing, like the night sky if all the stars were snuffed out.

The group parted. Honoring the pleas and petitions of the all the girls, the boys went down the beach a few hundred yards, leaving us cloaked in the anonymity of night. At least, cloaked from the boys. But us girls, we could see each other in gray tones, like we were dipped into a film noir. Being Christian women, we were beyond concerned. Many among us believed that the body is a scared gift given to your spouse upon marriage. As for me, I still don't know what I believe, but I did know then that if the boys were to see me, I would not be able to wipe away their memories.

I force myself to take away the pride I feel as I pose in front of the mirror...

Who would be proud of this mess?

I am not supposed to love this body, regardless of how much fat is packed under my skin. Good girls do not love themselves. Good girls are sufficiently ashamed.

But I am not. And I turn away from the mirror with a smile, envisioning an old, dusty book slamming shut.

The married girl was naked first. This was no surprise. She had no shame left; the mystery was revealed to her just a mere two months previously. She was allowed to be exposed. But the rest of us, we have not been known and we were hesitant. She was free before she even hit the water. I watched her white back slide into the foaming stew.

Young. Wild. Free. I kept repeating my mantra as I waded in deep enough to cover my large breasts, my suit still covering me.

I knew that skinny dipping was a rite of passage for many young people. It was not at all unusual. Then why did my chest tighten in fear as the water began to pull at the elastic waistband of my bathing suit bottoms?

It was strange, feeling the water slink its way around my upper thighs. It

was not wrong, but different. Like silk underwear, but salty and wet. The married girl was prancing around, her top half exposed to us, dripping and glowing with the little plankton that blinked neon blue when you agitated the water around them. I couldn't help but laugh. It was surreal and wonderful, the smooth water holding me as I peeled off my top.

Young. Wild. Free! I sang to myself as I dove into a large wave. I stood up like the married girl, uncovered to my bellybutton.

"Brianna, you should be careful!" a friend called to me, ducking low as an oncoming wave pulled the water level lower, careful not to expose anything below her neck.

No influential adults told me to be ashamed of my gender or my body growing up. No one ever pointed a finger at me and silenced me because I am a girl. I can vote, climb trees, get an education.

But I should not expose.

I once told my mother that for my teenage rebellion, I was going to drive down to Daytona Beach for spring break and flash my breasts for the *Girls Gone Wild* cameras. "If you did," she said seriously, her eyes sharp, "I'd be so ashamed of you."

This is a stupid idea, of course. I would never want to do that to myself. Lower my standards.

I even put myself on a pedestal.

The next night, we all went in together, girls and boys floating next to each other in a freakishly still salt soup. Far off in the distance, there was a storm brewing; we could see the white caps of waves every time heat lightening jumped from cloud to cloud, anxious.

We were anxious, too. Things had changed and no one could do anything about it. I had seen my friends' skins and I was not dead, not struck down by a righteous bolt from heaven. We were nervous as we waded. I kept my arms around my chest at all times. Who knew breasts had such buoyancy? I didn't want the boys to see them, my breasts. They were mine. I have final consent when to drop my shroud of shame.

I asked Chris later if he saw me. He said he didn't. I had covered up enough for the boys to be kept in the dark. But I was not in the dark. For the first time, I was exposed to myself.

If the freedom from excepted societal gender and sexual roles isn't in the exposing of myself, where does it come from? Is there a commune somewhere, full of proud women and ashamed men? Are there Madonna/whore men and warrior/heroine women?

What if a woman is content in her shame?

Genesis 3:13 "And the LORD God said unto the woman, 'What is this that thou hast done?'"

Later, when we were all safe and sound and clothed, back in Ohio, Chris asked me over lunch, "Why was it such a big deal? We were all naked."

I smiled. "You don't understand that women have more to lose."

He thought I meant that women had more private parts to cover.

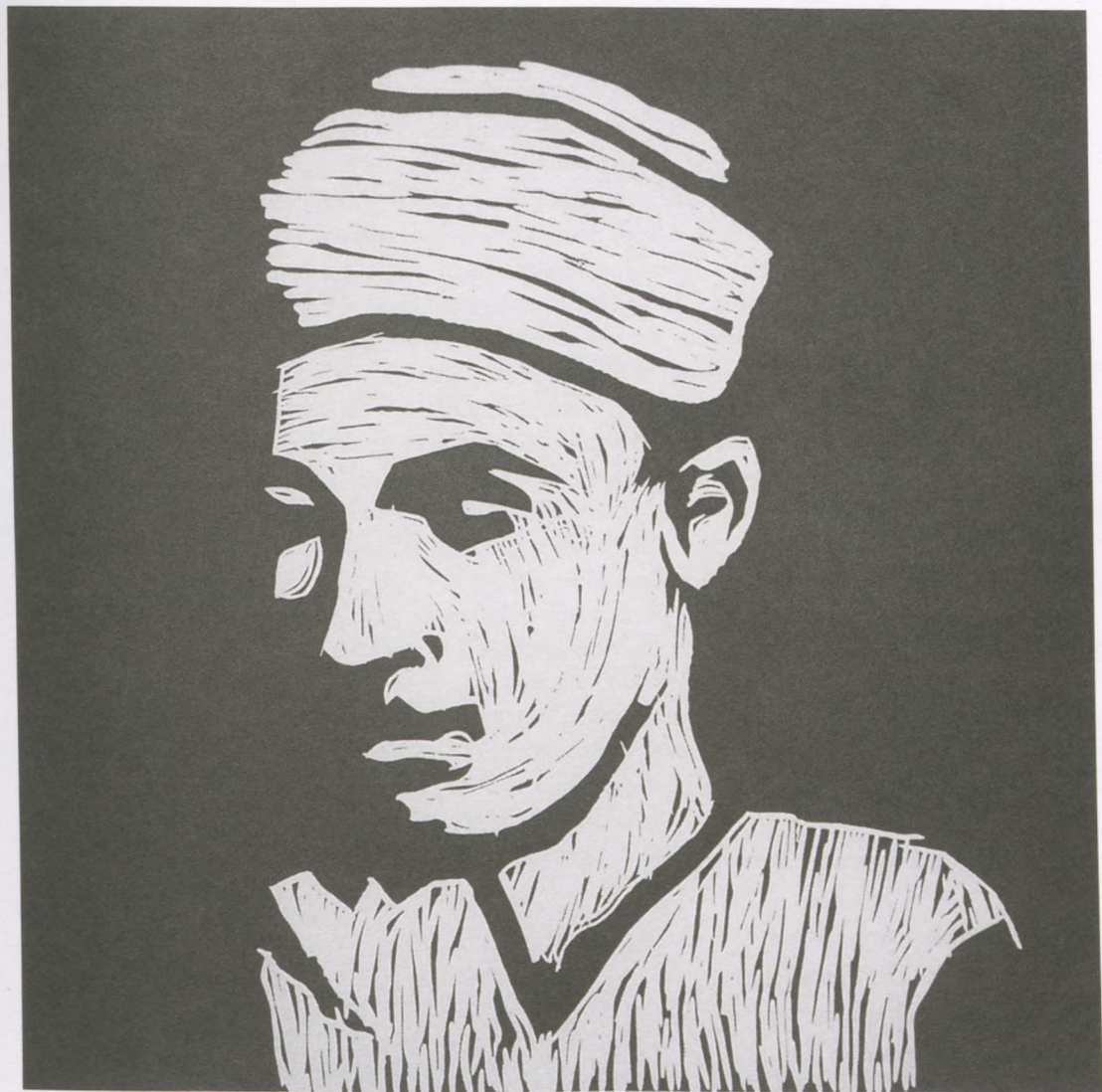
"Yes. We do," I replied and said nothing else on the subject.


What is it that I have done? My body is the same, perhaps minus a few hairs and skin cells and stress pounds. No fat scissors have cut away. No Stairmasters have sweated it all off me.

Like how a painful secret eats away at you from the inside, the ultimate relief comes from finally releasing it. I have exposed myself. I have no inclination to join a nudist colony. It is not a matter of clothing or lack thereof.

EGYPTIAN MAN

Sandi Thouvenin





A GHOST IN A FLUTE

Jessica Hilts

She knew there was something different
About her small glass flute
The sharp cold
That rattled her fingers
The way it always needed to be played
And when she would sleep
How it would play on

Or how she would wake
To her fingers silent dance
The pout that sat on her lips
All waiting for glass embrace
Where nothing else would soothe
That longing weight
Hanging like one heavy note

Heavy like their reunion
Where sighs were breathed in a wince
That turned slowly inward
And cowered at itself
Then burst instead of splintered
Down the hollow plank
Beckoning the next curious breath

Soon the notes fell faster
Like pregnant rain in spring
Carrying inside them
A secret yet unseen
Memories obscure and dark
Like forgotten round brown eyes
Cherished in someone else's mind



OSAGE ORANGE BOMB

Kathlene E. Boone

In the dead-leaf forest with nothing to lose but climbing tree space and bright,
useless, osage-orange currency—
These wars (the only ones I have ever fought) took place on the playground of a
school for peace run by the long-skirted Quakers—
Discussion of racial equality and verbal resolution, holding hands and singing
“Kumbaya” in the cross-legged classroom all day—
Passing around black crayons, white crayons, and red crayons and posing the
question, “Are any of us really these colors?”
These things led to the furious playground relief of generals and queens and
matadors with small-fisted, Machiavellian gusto.
As the leader, I would sit atop my pigtailed mud throne waiting for lesser cronies to
inform me of the news of the sticker trade.
There was always a looming invasion of the kickball field by the fearful fort near
the ginkgo tree. We had to get there first.
I imagine our teachers now, with their Montessori degrees, their hair and enormous
Navajo earrings dangling at their sides.
Their faces grew increasingly uncomfortable and their Birkenstocks trembled.
They conferenced about us in hushed voices.
They were loving on the enemy: The war-mongering, straight-shooting, inherently
violent offspring of the yoga-breath crowd.
Another dead-leaf season dawns on the fort-defending generals. We realize that we
have grown into and out of our combat boots.
We march and search for the same un-nameable peace, singing the same songs as
our mothers. We pose our own questions now,
such as, “What were the other kids playing?”



A FIELD OF BLUE MOTHS

Morgan Ritchie

The difference between black and white
marks the first feeling of a snake
caught in the garden grass.

At sixty-five, after he died the
moving company, lifting years of
bullshitting and quiet fears found
thirty-three boxes of blue hats
and blue dresses.

Black tar spots the blue dress until
she is nothing but a white moon in a
midnight sky. So thick, the red and white
poppies, she floats from green stem to
bulbous mouth. He told her she could
find a blue moth in his field of tar and
murky madness.

He always wore an overcoat and
carried an umbrella to mask the misfortunes
of a life uninspired. And where the old felt
hat cut rings around the ghostly vision of
white hair, he would imagine a crown of
blue moths, which were her favorite.

Missing the past like a fool, as she
clings to the two swollen points that
seep like a viewfinder into something
deep and holy, the snake lies quietly,
the imprint of the sandal her mother gave
her when she divorced, etched into the flat

part of its black and white shine back.

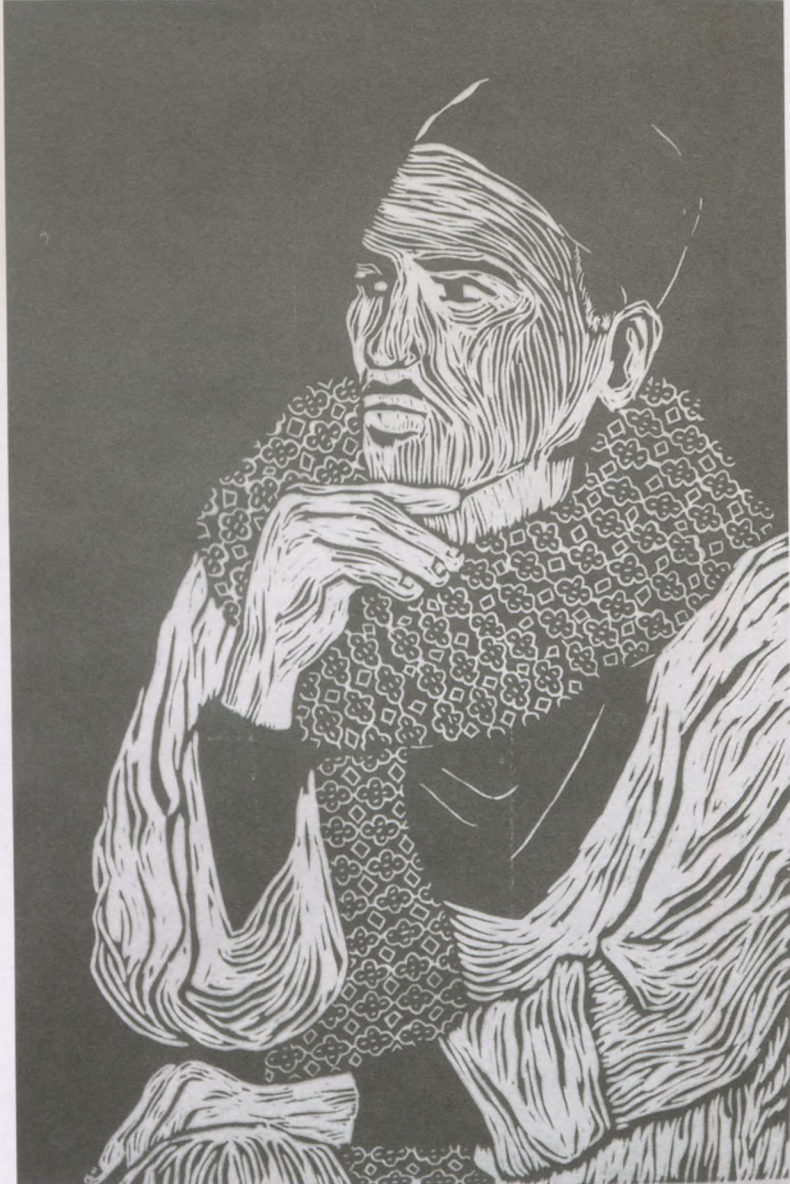
He was a doctor, only as an afterthought.
The constant smell of rubbing alcohol erased
any semblance of smell he once could muster. Then
too, his ability to remember touch and taste. Of her skin
they remarked, she tasted the way blue felt. An aura
of glow and magic. He could not recall when she left.
But still her blue dress, how the color wrapped around like
moths to a light, so fitting, so perfect. He bought her
a blue dress and hat every day that marked her death.

She lay coiled next to her black and white god. Bold,
daring, and foolish son of a woman's grief. Deep
in the field of poppies, so far from the sea, she lay
down to conquer her misery. And folded deep within
her breast a note that sang of deepness and rest,
an ode to the strands of hair left across his bed.
He would show her the place where blue moths
perch on thousands of white and red poppies. She found
him then in tar and dying, in the resolute tone of a
fading heart, in her blue dress marked like a muse's moan.



SAYEED

Sandi Thouvenin





CLOSING OF THE STEWS

Valerie Starkey

“Closing of the stews” <brothels.

Note: “French welcome” is syphilis.

Setting: a street corner in London, late 1500s. On one side of the street, Duke Robert Duffy has just left the tavern. His daughter’s maidservant, Rose, has come to escort him home. He is dodging her attempts to throw a cloak over his shoulders; while her goal is to protect his public dignity, he complains of the heat and will have none of it. On the other side of the street, Benjamin Graden the third, as obnoxious and snooty as the Benjamin Graden before him, but with more money for fuel, leaves the leather shop with a new knife holster, proud and primed for braggery.

Graden: Good day, Duke!

Duke: (grunting and nodding to the young man) Aye.

Graden: How are the gardens this afternoon? (He keeps looking down at his new knife sheath, trying to beg the Duke’s notice.)

Duke: (obliviously, drunk) Ah...the gardens. Can’t remember. Been a rough one...

Graden: See any ladies worth the mention? (He turns his sheath-side hip toward the Duke.)

Duke: None I plan to share, thank ye. (Looking left and right, slurring) I don’t welcome the French welcome...got a daughter to take care of.

Graden: Understood. Guess I’ll browse Swan Street then. I’m looking for a fine

lass. Perhaps a virgin. (sticks out his pelvis awkwardly to display his new leath-erware)

Duke: There's not a virgin in this whole quarter of London. Here, son...have a shilling for travel fare. You must head south a while. (winks)

Graden: (laughing at the Duke's wit, and becoming obsessed with fishing out of the man some small compliment regarding his sheath, begins an odd scooting motion toward the Duke; the motion seems to originate in the rear) Oh, Duke, you do keep the mood light in the street.

Duke: (aside, with regretful tone) I hate that.

Graden: (offended, that the Duke thinks so of his sheath) What, sir?

Duke: When the rump itches so... (Rose begins to have issues hiding her grin, thus turning the cloak to hide her blushing face.) (attempting empathy) To stand before other men at such a time makes a lad quite uncomfortable. I understand if you need to leave and return to the--

Graden: Begging your pardon, sir...but the only thing in need of a wiping is that smile upon the pig at your side.

Rose: (dropping the cloak, aghast) I'll 'ave none of it!

ENTER AURELIE (holding a pie) and GWEN

Aurelie: (scoping out Graden's protruding codpiece) (flirtatiously) I might... what's the offer?

Graden: (straightening up a little) I was only trying to show the kind Duke my new sheath, but he has misunderstood--

Duke: (poking fun) Ah...now the ladies have arrived the embarrassment is too much.

(Rose is still visibly offended.)

Graden: Sir, you have mis--

Duke: Miss Aurelie! (slurrily) And the redhead is for you tonight, I think!
(aside) That is, if you give up your little quest southward!

Aurelie: I beg your pardon, dear sir, but I 'ave a pie to deliver. (She presents it with one hand. He sniffs it, taking an extra moment to goggle at her cleavage and takes her other hand to kiss.)

Duke: I shall see you tomorrow night, dear Aurelie? (Now, Graden and Aurelie have made eye contact; Graden winks.)

Aurelie: Perhaps, good man (She smiles, teasing, and EXITS stage left, swaying her hips as she walks. GWEN attempts to take the spotlight, batting her eyelashes and sticking out her chest, but she is ignored.)

Duke: (now realizing the smug grin on Graden's face) Relief at last, eh? I didn't even notice you takin' care of your little situation. I believe you owe me for distracting the lass!

Graden: I was merely pleased to be reminded of her name...Aurelie... (sighs) I couldn't remember. Such a night it was. And so ironic...

Duke: Ironic how, sir?

Graden: (whispers to the Duke for a few seconds, Duke's face shows delight, then humor, then shock, and finally rage) You see, good man? Now I shan't forget her name!

Duke: Why you low-- (lunges at Graden, Gwen screeches)

Rose: You mustn't, M'Lord! (he attempts to grab his arm, which he swings violently in drunken rampage)

Duke: (to Rose) Off, broad!

Gwen: Help! Help! (ENTER COMMONERS, gathering to the noisy scene.



The more attention available, the more Gwen gets involved in the scuttle.) All over little ol' me!?!?

Commoner One: I doubt it. (Gwen shoots him/her a deathly glance.)

Duke: I'll have your blasted head on a plate!

Graden: Sir, I could topple you with a sigh.

Gwen: (sighs loudly as if in love and smiles at Graden, revealing a missing front tooth) Really sir, you--

Graden: (Disgusted) Begging your pardon. (He rushes out stage left.)

Duke: Coward!

Gwen: (Uncomfortably looking at the townspeople) 'e needed a bigger knife!

Rose: Aye, that 'e did... but not a bigger 'ead. Impossible. (turning to the Duke)
Good sir, let's be 'omeward.

Duke: (grunting approval, he allows Rose to cover his shoulders at last, and they EXIT stage right, mumbling about Graden's shortcomings.)

Gwen: (surrounded by townspeople quickly losing interest in her wellbeing) ... All better! (smiles weakly)

ENTER WATCHMAN ONE and WATCHMAN TWO

Watchman One: (waving a club in the air, looking ridiculous in the already dispersed crowd) Awright! Break it up, ye 'ear?!?

(COMMONERS shoot him glances that seem to question his sanity)

Watchman Two: (dully) I told ye there was no sense in coming o'er 'ere.

Watchman One: (all-importantly) Awright. You guard the young lass an' I'll

question the passersby.

Watchman Two: (rolling his eyes) Aye. (moves sluggishly toward Gwen)
G'day, lass.

Gwen: (giving the watchman her most grotesque attempt at a smile and again batting her lashes with tourette-like fiendishness.) Good DAY!

Watchman Two: (flashes her a brief half smile, careful not to give her any ideas)
Y' 'appen to know what was a'goin' on 'ere just a wee bit ago?

Gwen: Oh yes, sir! (nodding furiously, glad to finally have someone willing to listen to her side of the story) They was just 'ere a bit ago, roughing an' 'urtin' each other y' know. They both wanted to take me fer a walk, y' see. An' I told 'em... (searching) uh...sorry, sirs, but me gots a pie t' deliver. An' then my good friend AURELIE DOVER took the pie from me...took it to the good miss Simon down the way. Uh...an...because you see, she thought I might like a walk... an' she didn't know I 'ad already been walked this morning by a young lad.... A QUITE 'ANDSOME LAD (hoping to be overheard by the lingering eavesdroppers.) BY THE NAME OF SIR JOHN DEVERE! 'eaven knows after walkin' wit' a man like SIR DEVERE there's no reason any lass would need ta be walked again. Maybe ever (obnoxious giggle).

Commoner One: (to commoner two) I ain't never 'eard such a lie. Sir DeVere went to Southampton near a week ago. That girl 'asn't a brain in 'er.

Commoner Two: Think we should tell the watchmen?

Commoner One: (pondering the idea) Maybe it's best—

Commoner Three: Eh, just let 'em figger it out. Not likely it'll matter in—

Commoner Four: No, not likely they'll figger it out!!! (They all have a laugh.)

WATCHMAN ONE APPROACHES (He has been talking quietly with a group of beggars, and now looks quite intensely worried about the situation.)

Watchman One: S'cuse me, lads. Would ye mind tellin' me what ye saw 'ere just 'afore we got 'ere to break it up?

Commoners: (looking at each other, then in unison they start their stories)
There was a bloke with a hip problem...an' a drunkard...they was a fightin'... mighta knocked 'er teeth clean out! ...I 'eard somethin' 'bout a pie, that's all I wanted ter b'gin with.

Watchman One: (very interested) Okay, that's wonderful, sirs, now one at a time please.

Commoner Two: That Graden fellow...ave ye 'eard of 'im?

Watchman One: Aye.

Commoner Two: 'e was tryin' to secure 'imself a stew fer the night, it sure sounded like t'me.

Watchman One: (gasps) 'asn't 'e 'eard the new law? It's not safe anymore...

Commoner Three: An' it's not religious.

Commoner Four: Never 'as been, lad! But lotsa folks muss like it! (Roaring laughter surrounds the bunch. Even the watchman puts in a nervous snicker.)

Commoner One: But don't ye think the stews'll just 'ide about quiet-like 'an still 'elp a lad when he needs it?

Commoner Two: (aside to Commoner Four) When 'is wife won't 'elp 'im out, 'e means!

Commoner One: My wife's not an 'umping post like yours, then?

Commoner Two: You 'ad best watch yer mouth lad.

Commoner Three: (looking upward) Dear God, please—

Watchman One: I think that'll be enough (Nervously holds his club out between them. The audience can see the club shaking.)

Commoner One: Does she bring 'er money 'ome?

Commoner Two: Y've gone too far! (leaps past the watchman's shaking club and grabs Commoner One by the collar) You spake after y—(grunts, struggling with the man)

Watchman One: Stop, brute! (The commoners disregard his feeble pleas. One by one, a giant mass reforms and all fists are flying.)

LIGHTS GO OUT on the rowdy scene and when the LIGHTS COME UP, only the watchmen are left, sitting back to back on the ground, bruised and beaten.

Watchman Two: I told ye we shouldn'ta come.

CURTAIN

UNTITLED

Katelyn Douglass





END IN WEIGHT

Jessica Hilts

At the end of the day
Everything grows heavy

Lights lose their grip
On bright colors
And settle in rich shades

Eyelids sink
Until finally clasped down

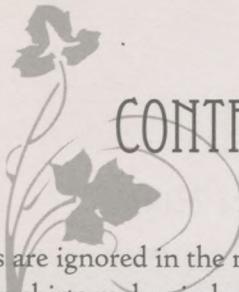
Every "toc" of the clock
Sounds just a little
More deeply than "tic"

High noon whistles, when afternoon hums
And evening sighs

At the end of the day
Each coin leaves the palm
A little less willingly

And even when it's gone
Its metallic fragrance lingers

At the end of the day
Words hold more meaning
And press deeper within



CONTRA SUSPENDERS

Kathlene E. Boone

The fiddle tunes are ignored in the name of the moving picture
Whirligig cotton skirts make circles on the wooden floor
My tall father's laced-up shoes turning in the shuffle
Never a family for talking, but strictly for unison, New England social contra whispers
Banjo picking, foot stomping, brown rice and tofu ladies kiss on his bearded cheek
They do not shave their armpits and they smell like tenure and book worms

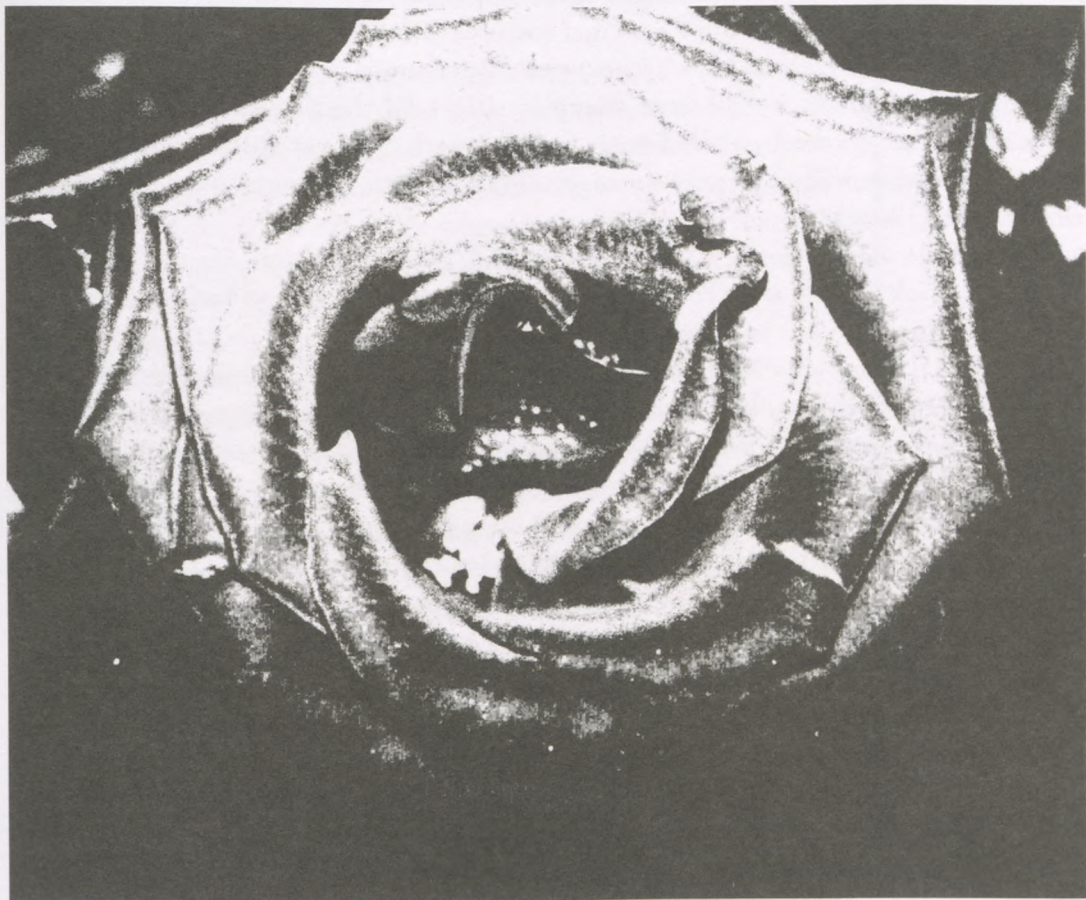
I envy the caller, twanging her voice in time and manipulating we mannequins
The strange, freckled man playing upright bass knows my family, and he winks
I coyly twirl past him and enter into my line, skip back out again, and never look back
Sweat trickles down my small arms and into my hands as I grasp those of my partner
He has changed his button-down rodeo shirts eighty times, but seems to be as sticky as I
I politely decline the next excursion and look for my father's loud, red suspenders

I see them dancing with a woman carrying a baby sling on her front, daughter cooing
Americana gypsy songs in the lulled background of the hall make everything haloed
Jealousy consumes my fists in the name of my mother, who was never danced with
I stomp over in three-four time and create a scene, purposely embarrassing, purposely
cutting in

We exchange stares, and then, in the tradition of my father and me, we say nothing
Instead, my bare feet lay gently on his and we sway, and the mandolin plinks everything
all better

UNTITLED

Katelyn Douglass



A decorative illustration in the top left corner features a nautilus shell with a worm emerging from it. The shell is rendered in a stylized, almost woodcut-like manner, with the worm's head and body visible as it curls out of the shell's aperture.

NAUTILUS SHELL & WORM

W.T. Jamison

Just before eleven in the morning, I had stopped to sit on a very short brick wall in front of the library to smoke a cigarette – which was the first of the day and the last for two hours. The weather was surprisingly warm, not for the season but for the week, for it had been exceptionally cold the previous few days, and I confused the smoke I exhaled with frosty breath, not yet fully acknowledging that the weather had changed overnight. And bright; I remember the day being exceptionally bright.

While I was there, sitting on the fifth brick from the edge of that very short red brick wall, I noticed a worm that I first took for dead but soon realized was very much alive – as much alive as worms can be. I didn't see the worm at first – there on the sidewalk brown as the very near dirt – a religious contrast to the cement sidewalk; I was, I believe, occupied instead by rubbing my eyes and fixing my hair under my hat. I was sitting probably a full three minutes before I noticed this worm inching toward me – its body scrunching and then releasing its coil into its tip – what I can imagine was its head – stretching it in my direction.

And just like that, I knew I had to write about my worm – the worm that I now called my own. It was the same revelation, I think, that captured Virginia Woolf, perhaps not Annie Dillard, but definitely also Alice who ventured into Wonderland. It was my white rabbit, as Joyce Dyer would put it – the thing that all writers simply must write about, despite all efforts to write about what they find most pertinent at the moment; the thing that claws at one's attention and cognition until, finally, you give in and regard it with some sort of compassion and kindness; until you finally allow it to crawl through the inner labyrinths of your brain that you sometimes fear to step into lest you get lost and never come back out. The worm grabbed me, and I grabbed back. And we went for a ride together into the dangerous territory of creative writing.

I pulled out a pen and tablet from my back-pack, and I jotted down notes about the worm – some of which I've already included, others that I now dismiss as rubbish.

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While I was writing in my tablet about a worm just feet from me in front of the

library, I was distracted by a shirtless man skateboarding on the other side of the building; this distraction was a surprise, for, I suppose, it hadn't yet dawned on me - at that relatively early hour in the morning - that one could be distracted from a distraction, which was my crippled worm. I was shocked that the man was shirtless, first and foremost, because, though it was warmer than it had been, people were still wearing jackets and gloves all through campus. The sun had not yet warmed the earth or the pavement upon which he rode, to say nothing of the sharp air that he quickly glided through.

And just like that, my concentration broke. I was no longer enthralled by my worm, and when I finally did look back to it, it was gone. Perhaps a bird picked him up - though that is unlikely, for I think I would have noticed that somewhere in my periphery - or perhaps I was looking away long enough to grant him leave to the other side of the sidewalk where he probably burrowed himself into the soft earth under the mulch around the near meager bushes, though that too is unlikely, for he was traveling without much haste.

Either way, my moment with my worm was over.

That'll make a great piece of writing.

In hindsight, I realize that no matter how ardently I tried to focus on the worm, I would not have been able to write anything coherent or awe-inspiring, for I was not only distracted by the shirtless man but also by my calculations of how soon I'd need to buy more cigarettes - for that is something that is frequently on my mind because of my lack of funds and lack of time. Or time management. Or addiction - it is hard to tell which, sometimes.

Writing inspiration is a fleeting thing, I suppose - or perhaps only a small crawling thing.

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I sat smoking, and I saw a worm, once.

At some point, I lost sight of him.

My worm.

I can't even keep track of a damned worm long enough to get a good piece of writing out of my system.

I mean that I can't keep track of the worm mentally long enough for it to have a firm place in my mind.

Time for it to grasp one of my folded cortexes.

To leave a deep impression in my mind.

I thought.

I can't follow my white rabbit for very long because he escapes me almost

as soon as I am in his intricate system of tunnels.

The little bastard is a squirrely one I suppose.

Too slippery for me to grab.

I just wish he was a peck fatter so that he would slow down, because I have smoker's lungs, and I simply can't move that fast in small spaces like that.

I can't keep track of a worm no matter how desperately I wish to.

...Because of this I am incapable of writing I wrote in my tablet in regard to losing my worm/moth/rabbit.

<><><>

I once sat in front of my campus library and watched a worm crawl on the nearby sidewalk. I quickly retrieved my tablet and pen from my back-pack and began to write. Though I started to write about the worm that had grabbed my attention, the words on the page quickly shifted to how I feel as though I am simply incapable of writing anything worth writing. And I do that more often than not, accuse myself of not being able to write – or write well, I suppose. However, I realize that at one time or another, I will be able to – for, I don't think that masterpieces are written in the first sitting which is usually all I grant myself for writing. I said that I may be incapable of writing on the page in my open tablet, but somewhere in the nautilus shell of my being, I know that that isn't true; if it was, why would I still be writing after five years of trying as hard as I have been to write? But, I believe I can write. Not being able to feign interest in an almost ghastly brown worm – which I believe was severely handicapped or deformed – doesn't mean that I can't write. I decided, through writing heavily in my tablet, that I indeed was capable of following my white rabbit – just that my white rabbit, my moth, my scaffolding, isn't a worm or an intersection. I was so easily distracted by a shirtless skateboarder that I quickly lost sight of my worm. My white rabbit – the thing that gets me into the rabbit hole of creative writing – is a shirtless skateboarder. Or nicotine. Or writing, I suppose. Although – and here is my time for confession – I have been encountering my roommate shirtless quite a bit recently; and he is a skateboarder. And he smokes. And writes. Perhaps I was following an appropriate muse, then, in writing that epistolary piece about him not so long ago. Or, perhaps, then, for me, he is a *perfect* white rabbit – which is a thought that I have been trying to disregard as of late. But it haunts me so, to this day – his body, those pictures, that letter, those long walks through the cold city night. I tried to abandon my obsession in him, but a simple worm brings me back to him; perhaps, though, it isn't such a bad thing to write about, working under the assumption that at least mediocre writing will come out of these fixations.

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While watching a crippled, very brown worm slide across a sidewalk, I found myself thinking about how I once believed that I couldn't write, or write well, because I had run as fast as I could into a thick wall upon which was written, in Joyce Dyer's cursive: *Find a dead rabbit, a white rabbit to follow into the underground labyrinth of writing.* I believed, of course, that since there must be a white rabbit for writing, and I didn't have one, that I couldn't write at all. Through scribbling in a tablet, I found that I did have one at the time, it just wasn't anything nearly as classy as a white rabbit or dying moth.

So I have become increasingly comfortable with the knowledge of truly having a white rabbit, though it isn't any sort of moth or Charles Manson or Joan Baez. My moth - I mean rabbit - has recently become writing, though what arrests my attention the most is definitely nicotine.

If I do, in fact, need to find a white rabbit to my Alice, then I suppose I am in good shape to write. I have possessed an Edie Sedgwick for quite some time. I just need more tries writing about it well enough to do justice.

I believed that I couldn't write because my inspiration, my muse, was nothing so classy as Woolf's or Didion's or Dillard's or Dyer's or Warhol's. I've convinced myself that I can write - that is what I am constantly telling myself, at least. And, I have come to the conclusion that if I cannot write well, I definitely enjoy it, and perhaps that is what matters most.

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Deb Abramson wrote, "[T]his is why I write: because there is room, finally, in these pages, for the words to come out, and because I still yearn for that gentle listener who was missing from my life for so long, each string of black letters like one more delicate chain that will link us together in experience, you and I."

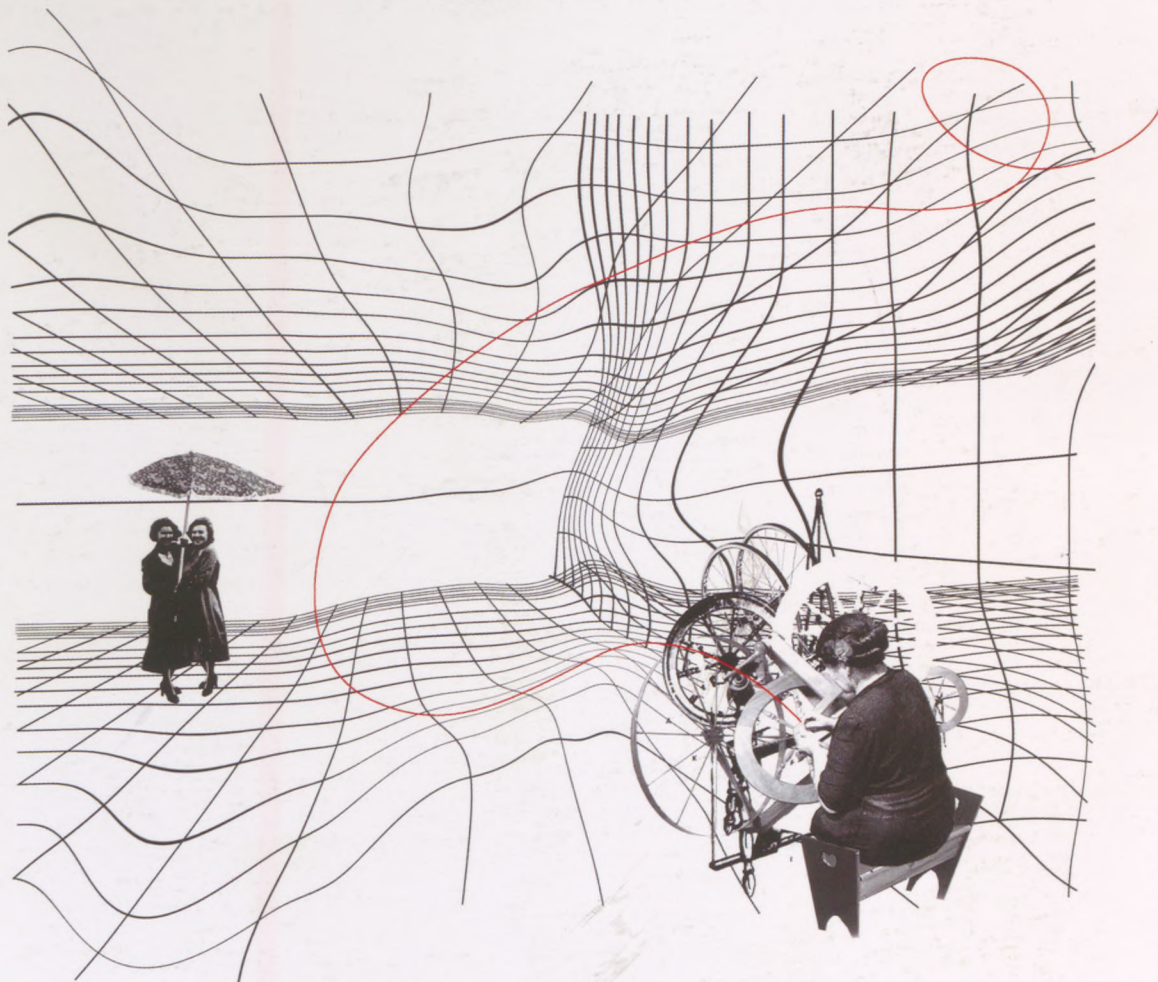
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And now I wonder if that is where I should end - if that is the quote that I wish to end with; or should I un-delete the passage that followed? He would like it this way, my muse would - my roommate, my shirtless skateboarder, my moth. My Joan Baez. And I have learned enough to know that if he will probably like it, this is how I should keep it. I do not write for myself, after all - though I am the one that gets the most pleasure from it - I am writing for my muse. My Edie Sedgwick.

Angel Alexander
Claire Augustine
Kathlene E. Boone
Joanna Brown

Maggie Coffey
Nick DeFazio
Greg Dennie
Katelyn Douglass
Raichal Gladman
Jessica Hilts
Ali Horton
W.T. Jamison

Brianna McPherson
Manuel Alejandro
Melendez
Kate Mock
Claire Parson
Morgan Ritchie
Sandi Thouvenin
Valerie Starkey



"The Three Fates" by Maggie Coffey